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NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release
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New wolf pack to be released in Arizona

PINETOP, Ariz. -- A pack of four Mexican gray wolves will be placed in a temporary holding pen, located near Middle Mountain in the Apache National Forest, in preparation for the endangered animals' release in Arizona. Arizona Game and Fish Department officials say the wolves will be moved to the pen site during the first week of July in order to meet ongoing wolf reintroduction objectives.

The family group, called the Meridian pack, consists of an alpha male and female and two pups. The pack will stay in a nylon mesh, low-impact acclimation pen for up to two weeks. If they do not release themselves by the end of that period, then wolf project biologists will free them.

The pen site, about 10 miles southwest of Alpine, Ariz., will have a signed, one-mile public closure surrounding it, ordered by the USDA Forest Service, to protect the wolves from disturbance. The closure will remain in effect while the wolves occupy the area.

"The Meridian pack release is part of an interagency program begun in 1998 to reintroduce Mexican wolves to a portion of their historic habitat in east-central Arizona and southwestern New Mexico," says Shawn Farry, the department's wolf project field team leader. "With this release, we are attempting to augment the breeding wolf population now in the wild and also to maintain the genetic diversity of the current population."

Farry says that despite recent setbacks, the project is still progressing. "Existing packs are doing well, with most producing pups this year, and new packs are forming. The Meridian pack will join nine other packs now living in the wild in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in Arizona and New Mexico." He also notes that the Middle Mountain release site was chosen in close coordination with the public and with approval from the USDA Forest Service.

The reintroduction of the Mexican gray wolf is a cooperative, multi-agency effort of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, White Mountain Apache Tribe, USDA Forest Service and USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services.

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